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C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 000692

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: ABDULLAH WILL RUN; IC SHOULD QUICKLY PROVIDE INPUT
TO LEVEL PLAYING FIELD FOR OPPOSITION

REF: KABUL 535

Classified By: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION CHRISTOPHER DELL FOR REASONS 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Former Foreign Minister Dr. Abdullah Abdullah told Paul Jones, Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (DSRAP), 3/15 he will publicly announce his candidacy for president within a week. He counted on the support of several influential United Front party members and claimed he would easily gain the support of the remaining UF leadership. Abdullah also asked the international community to act quickly in circulating ideas to level the playing field for all candidates. Finally, Abdullah said he expected the opposition would unite after the first round of voting behind one candidate in order to defeat President Karzai in a potential second round vote.

Decision to Run

¶2. (C) Former Foreign Minister Dr. Abdullah Abdullah told DSRAP Jones he intended to run for president and counted fellow United Front coalition members Ahmad Wali Massoud (brother of First Vice President and fellow UF presidential hopeful Ahmad Zia Massoud) and Lower House Speaker Qanooni as supporters. After he consults with UF party leader Burhanuddin Rabbani and the other UF presidential hopeful First VP Ahmad Zia Massoud, both of whom Abdullah claimed were ready to support him, Abdullah will publicly announce his candidacy. Haji Ibrahim, Lower House Speaker Qanooni's brother and chief of staff, confirmed the UF will announce its candidate within the week.

Continuity of Authority

¶3. (C) Abdullah is reluctantly willing to accept Karzai remaining in office until the inauguration of the next president if Karzai agrees to limit his authority, for example, to make government appointments. Abdullah suggested the international community make specific suggestions on how to limit Karzai's power during the interim period. The IC should make these suggestions soon to prevent political and civil turmoil as 5/22 approaches, Abdullah urged.

¶4. (C) DSRAP told Abdullah that because Afghanistan needs a clear presidential authority to counter security threats and ensure stability, the U.S. view is that President Karzai should stay in office through the post-8/20 inauguration. However, the U.S. understands opposition concerns that Karzai could unfairly use government resources to aid his re-election campaign and would seriously consider Abdullah's advice regarding circulating proposals geared towards leveling the playing field. DSRAP added that the U.S. had no favored candidate and would not back any one candidate over another.

Karzai's Recruitment Efforts

¶5. (C) Demonstrating his increasingly close ties to Karzai (reftel), former Defense Minister and Northern Alliance commander Marshall Fahim asked Abdullah to support Karzai during a 3/14 dinner. Abdullah declined and asserted that Fahim, "deep in his heart," still supported the UF over Karzai. Karzai was also trying to curry the favor of Hazara leader and UF ally Lower House MP Mohaqqueq but, Abdullah predicted, Mohaqqueq would not shift his support to Karzai.

Karzai's Chances

¶6. (C) Abdullah predicted approximately three serious opposition candidates would emerge from the first round of voting and unite in the second round to defeat Karzai. Karzai will lose 90 percent of the advantages of incumbency in the second round, Abdullah claimed. Further, 80 percent of Kandahar's population would not support Karzai because they would see a Karzai re-election as five more years of suffering under the abuses of Karzai's brother, Ahmad Wali Karzai.

Comment

¶7. (C) Abdullah is a serious and important candidate, but without opposition unity, Karzai remains the clear front-runner.

¶8. (U) DSRAP Paul Jones cleared this message.
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